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ABSTRACT

The underlying theory of the Teacher Corps Rural-Migrant programs in visual literacy is developed in this paper. The primary objective of teaching communication skills to non-native speakers of English through the use of motion picture cameras is detailed in discussion of how visual literacy motivates students and improves curriculum development. The types of activities incorporated into an educational experiment at the Yettem School indicate the interrelatedness between the traditional communication skills and the more innovative approach to the development of those skills through film. Elements of the program described include: (1) visual vistas--single framing, (2) multiple-frame experiences, (3) slide presentations, (4) motion pictures, (5) visual-verbal textbooks, (6) field trips, and (7) selecting a subject. (RL)

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VISUAL LITERACY

A CHILD-CENTERED READING PROGRAM

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It is becoming painfully obvious that American school children still aren't learning how to read...and the numbers are shocking...despite "crash" programs for the disadvantaged, despite new gadgetry, despite the swing from phonics to work recognition and back to phonics again. We blame television as the lurer-away-from-the written word. And Sesame Street proves us wrong. We blame the limited environment of the child of poverty. But how do we account for middle class kids? Their reading failures, an embarrassment and a puzzlement in the midst of environmental opulence, are just as pronounced. The most recent figures published by the US Office of Education bluntly state that 14-16% of all Americans...one out of six...are functional illiterates!

We submit that kids aren't learning how to read because we turn them off with the traditional "Dick and Jane" adult-authored texts, which are either oversimplifications which insult the sophistication of a mass-media oriented generation, or else use a symbolic lexicon which has no relevance in their lives... e.g., a middle class living room which looks nothing like their own, or the stereotyped middle class family with a father as the head of the household.

As we reviewed the works of Piaget, Bruner, and other child development specialists, in trying to find a clue to a child's "reading readiness" age, several observations kept recurring:

-2/3 of our intellectual growth occurs before the age of six;

-every child "composes" language long before he can recognize the symbolic lexicon of written language; this becomes evident as he talks with members of his

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family, relates incidents to them, plays with his peers, etc;

-by the time a child reaches school, at the age of five, he knows, intuitively, all the grammar of his language he will ever know, and can manipulate that language well enough to express the thoughts and needs of his milieu;

-we expect the child to conform to our adult perception of "appropriate" curriculum, which is teacher-centered, instead of encouraging him to verbalize about his child-centered world, thereby discovering himself and sharing of his world through purposeful communication; language learning, in both first and second languages, is closely tied to affective behavior, to concrete and subjectively relevant experiences, and to communication; children can conceptualize about their world beyond their ability to verbalize.

Why not, then, turn each child's environmental experiences into curriculum for the classroom? allowing the child to discover himself and share in the excitement of becoming an active participant in the teaching/learning process.

It was based on these assumptions that Teacher Corps Rural-Migrant undertook its project in Visual Literacy, a program to teach not only purposeful communication, but communication in a child's second language (English) to children of migrant and seasonal farm workers in Tulare County California.

We believed that the implications of a child-centered reading curriculum for the non-English-speaking child, whose problems in the classroom are cumbered by cultural alienation and linguistic isolation, would have broad impact for any student populations. And indeed they have.

If, indeed, we recognize that every child brings his own set of background experiences to the learning situation then why not use those experiences for curriculum building? To start with the child "where he's at" is the time-honored formula which has enjoyed so much lip-service. However, we have failed to practice its application. It is indeed time to capitalize on the positives the child

brings to the classroom, allowing him to discover himself and to emerge as a learner sharing this joy of self-discovery.

Visual literacy utilizes each child's family, his home, his life experiences, as he learns how to speak English (his second language) and learns how to read what he himself has written about what he has captured on film.

The USC child-centered Visual Literacy reading program started with the assumption that even the child who suffers from socio-economic-educational disadvantagement has a bank of environmental experiences which are neither adequately exposed or fully developed by traditional teaching techniques and that the camera can become the incentive tool which allows that child to conceptualize his ideas and thus to share the excitement of discovery, interaction, and exploration of self and the external world which are part of the learning process.

Public education has long been fascinated with the intent of the message of perhaps its greatest educational philosopher, John Dewey. Early in this century, Dewey's advocacy of "learning by doing" led to all manner of experimentation in his name. Too often, however, the point Dewey was making was missed. To Dewey, "mind is the...on-going significant organization of self and world...". Nowhere, according to him could a child involved in the adventure of growing and learning unify the beauty of self, world, and mind better than in the community.

Why not, then, encourage the child to go to that portion of his experience that he knows best-his community, his world---to involve him in language-building experiences? Why not place in his hand a device capable of recording his adventures as he moves through that world so that he can give visual credence to what he has actually learned? And why not then use what he has recorded as the basis for his own personal set of learning materials?

For the child who is learning English as a Second Language, visual literacy can have especially exciting implications: the camera becomes the "third eye" which allows that child to become an active participant in the discovery process. By visually verbalizing about his world, he begins to organize and order those things in his immediate environment which are familiar, which have form and structure. A facial expression, a piece of furniture, a tree, can convey an idea or be representational. Thereby those become elements of language. Without being constantly aware of it, the child with a camera is learning, at his own rate and painlessly, about the phonology, the morphology and the syntax of language... and this learning is applicable to his native language as well as to his second language. He is learning...since even the photographic statement can have subject elements, predicate elements and object elements, to order the symbolic lexicon of oral and written communication.

By allowing children to use cameras, it is possible to develop self-actualizing English-second-language curriculum which is particularly relevant for those children lacking in school "know-how" or otherwise unwilling or psychologically unprepared to become involved in the usual teacher-student relationships. The transition from visual literacy to other forms of communication is a self-generated step, instead of a threatening and often rejected process.

The child who is linguistically different...who feels he is different because his language is not the acceptable standard...often feels he must be different in other ways, too. If he is made to feel that his language is not desirable...that there is something wrong with the way he talks...it is a short step to the conclusion that there is something wrong with him. By first allowing him to create visually, with a camera, before he moves on to the symbolic lexicon of a first or second language, we can show such a child that he exists in a real world, that he can safely share his emotions and thought processes, and that he has something to say which <u>others care about!</u>

We believe literacy is more than the teaching of the 3 R's: it suggests that each individual has much to learn about himself and what he is capable of doing, and that in that process and interaction and a sharing of experiences... communication occurs. For a child with a camera, the world is suddenly commented upon, extracted from, and made forever a part of his identity.

Visual literacy allows him to build a positive self-image even as he struggles to make that image fit into the new cultural patterns of his school community and the middle-class world.

Visual Literacy makes it possible:

(1) To destroy the myth that learning must be externally imposed and to demonstrate that the use of camera hardware can actualize and capitalize on the inherent intellectual curiosity and learning potential of children;

(2) To focus on the need for our media-oriented society to utilize technology in the classroom, in order to allow children to articulate their experiences in an orderly fashion, for intentional communication...visually as well as verbally;

(3) To show that learner-centered curriculum created by the child with hardware (a camera) which allows that child to "invent" himself and conceptualize about the world he lives in, is a more effective teaching tool than teacher-generated, cognitively devised material, which must be taught to in a rigidly structured and controlled sequence; and to show that such curricula can be articulated in social studies, science, math and other subject areas as well as in language arts;

(4) To maximize the affective and cognitive development of children, and to build in children a hierarchy of perceptive and sensory skills, including recognition of differences in brightness, size, shape, color and depth perception, as entre to the more sophisticated process-oriented communication and problem-solving skills;

(5) To help develop a sense of responsibility and positive concepts of self in children who may have never before experienced pride of ownership, by encouraging them to use their very own simple camera equipment, not only at school, but in their neighborhood community;

(6) To show that "writing" with the camera as a pencil is a logical first step to the development of literacy, because, in actuality every child composes in his mind before he is ready to read;

(7) To capitalize on the environmental experiences which children, no matter what their socio-economic status, bring to the classroom, in order to enrich the learning situation for the total school population; to show that schools which fail to integrate these experiences into their curricula are the real underachievers;

(8) To encourage the child to build on his own language and experience bank using camera hardware to learn at his own rate, "ready himself" for reading and other communication skills, produce his own learning materials, and succeed in academic tasks;

The linguistically disadvantaged child has special problems which early training in visual literacy can help him overcome:

—most available materials for early childhood education contain language beyond his experience. This child becomes easily frustrated when he cannot respond with acceptable verbal labels for familiar objects depicted in these materials.

—linguistically different children come to school with a language of their own and an experience bank which does not prepare them to carry out typical middle class learning tasks.

—children who speak no English or a substandard dialect of English frequently encounter teachers who do not understand them, and retreat to silence.

—the linguistically different child who must respond to predetermined pictorial verbal symbols in a traditional reading text (i.e. the living room of a

middle class home which looks nothing like his own) is often labelled "retarded" because he fails to make "correct" responses to such symbols.

Visual literacy purports to introduce an intermediate step to bridge the gap between oracy and literacy. Traditionally, a child is taught to read, then to compose by writing. In actuality, however, he is composing long before he ever reads.

By the time a child reaches school at age five he knows intuitively all the grammar of his language he will ever know and can manipulate his language well enough to express the thoughts and needs of his milieu. He is, in fact, composing all the time as he talks with members of his family, relates incidents to them, plays with language and games, etc.

Once a child has composed visually, he can begin to compose verbally. What he captures with his camera becomes a whole story for him, complete with all the nuances of good story-telling. It is then a short step from oral composition to reading. If the story he composes from his pictures is tape recorded and typewritten for him, he will begin to associate sounds with symbols, especially as he plays back his recording and hears his voice pronouncing words as he visualizes them on paper. Thus, he begins to teach himself to read and prepares himself for more formal instruction in reading to come within the next few years.

The following types of activities were incorporated into the USC Teacher Corps: Rural-Migrant/Kodak design:

Visual Perception Training

I. Visual Vistas (single framing):

a. The Camera Composes The child is asked to use his still camera as a "third eye" to visually record a particular portion of a whole thing he sees. When his picture is printed he is encouraged to verbalize about what he has recorded. He is, in fact, extending visual composition into verbal

composition.

b. The Teacher tape records and writes the child's spoken words. The teacher records this verbal composition by printing below the child's picture the child's statement. In collecting his own visual literacy materials, each child thus builds his own reading curriculum. He gradually begins to inductively connect the sounds of language with the symbolic lexicon of printed language. The teacher is also able to help a child to become literate in a second language using these materials. The teacher uses a variety of single-frame experiences for different reasons:

1. To ask a child to focus on a section of the whole ("Take a picture of school". What emerges, of course, is many different aspects of school, the whole).
2. To ask a child to focus on one thing among many things ("there are some flowers. Take a picture of a flower"). This allow the child to practice visual discrimination.
3. To ask a child to build a language experience out of a single frame ("Take a picture that tells a story"). There the teacher uses the tape recorder or the typewriter to record or write the children's stories).

II. Multiple-Frame Experiences: The child is asked to use his "third eye" to tell a story. As his story unfolds, he creates the narrative and necessary dialogue and records this on the tape recorder. A teacher aide, using the primary typewriter, transcripts visually the child's recorded story. In putting the two together, the child constructs his own reading materials:

The Teacher uses a variety of situations in which he asks children to tell stories. The children begin with using their cameras in the school, and gradually move into their homes and the community, constantly recording

their own world and building from their own experience banks.

By bringing to school pictures of his own environment each child is sharing his private world in a positive context designed to gain approval and thus continuing to build a positive self-image.

III. Slide Presentations: A logical outgrowth of the still photo is the slide. Because of its capacity to be visually more stimulating, children can use slides effectively.

With slides, children extend the concept of sequence of plot in a story. Because slides are projectable, they can be utilized for total group involvement (a child can tell his story into a tape recorder and play it back for the class as he simultaneously manipulates the slide projector), telling his story in sequence.

At this stage, also, children begin to work in groups to build a story by combining slides and experiences. The result is a group composition for presentation to the class, with each child in the group contributing his ideas to the story. Children thus learn to make decisions using the democratic process, and also begin to build concepts of taste and discrimination in deciding which ideas can best be used.

IV. Motion Pictures: Children move rather easily from telling a story by using slides to telling a story with motion pictures. Where the "slide show" must be accompanied by a narrative that tells what is happening and thus provides the movement, the motion picture records the movement, and the language component becomes visual as well as narrative.

The teacher has the children group themselves, and then asks each group to compose a story that contain action. Because children are using a motion picture camera, they are encouraged to plan the "motion" in their story very carefully. Techniques of Improvisational Theater are integrated

Dialogue between characters, for instance, must be handled visually, and may call for wide, sweeping gestures and melodramatic postures. In this respect, the teacher relies heavily on the use of educational drama as she encourages children to practice "silent language" through acting. Children who might otherwise be stymied because they lack the language facilities to verbalize in an acceptable fashion can thus communicate effectively through mime.

In using the motion picture camera, children also learn the mechanics of group participation. Someone must be responsible for filming the story, someone for acting it out, someone for directing, someone for projecting the finished product, etc. They thus learn to work together to produce a story.

An important element being learned is the basis for much of the language arts work the child will later face in his schooling. He is inductively involving himself in the process of composing, first visually, then verbally, all the while composing for an audience that he knows will react to what he has to say. He is learning the various components of literature by composing literature visually (he knows that plot means a story has a beginning, goes somewhere, and has an ending; he knows that characters act and react within the plot; he even responds to nuances of messsage - what he wants to say - of mood - how the story makes him feel-, and atmosphere - what kind of "feeling" he is hoping to project to his audience).

V. Visual-Verbal Textbooks: Created by the child, and subject to daily changes, record each child's visual experiences at home, at school, and in the community. Before writing skills are developed, the children write their

stories visually with the camera, orally and aurally on the tape recorder for the teacher to print or put on the typewriter. The joy of having a camera and the responsibility of caring for it (for children who might never before have possessed anything that was exclusively theirs) has obvious effects in terms of developing a sense of responsibility and a feeling of importance. Home visits and flyers are used to explain the program to parents, and the responsibility of the children in having their cameras.

VI. Field Trips: Field trips to allow the child to explore, visually record, read and talk about the world beyond his immediate neighborhood and classroom community will help to broaden the scope of the program, the child's experiential range, and the extensiveness of the world he comments about, visually and with spoken and written language.

VII. The Challenge of Choosing a Subject: As the program progresses, children face more sophisticated tasks; e.g., to photograph "things that pop", balloons, bubble gum, popcorn, for example. The story-telling and language articulation possibilities in such task-oriented projects are obvious, and the kind of interaction they create between the child and his peers will have carryover effects that prepare him to respond to a variety of situations beyond the school and home.

In addition children learn about the leadership role, about problem solving skills, about how to function as part of a team, about how to delegate authority, about participative management.

Rosemary Gardner and Carolyn Ingram, the Teacher Corps Rural-Migrant Interns who were the teachers for the USC Visual Literacy-Reading Project saw themselves as facilitators for the verbalization and communication of things already known and conceptualized by the children. Some of their comments follow:"...the faces...

of the children when they first saw the cameras; their attention when the mechanics were being explained; their excitement when they saw the first pictures (and disappointment when some of the pictures were blurry;) their enthusiasm over the words they wrote, spoke, and taped; their initiative in asking for the vocabulary words they needed to tell their stories; their happiness at reading their own words..." ..."Taking pictures one day...starting with assignments, gradually moving to freedom and independence with the cameras...writing and reading stories the next, they move from self, to school, to home, to Community..." The teachers saw themselves "acting as facilitators first and foremost","listening to dictated stories, supplying words when needed, prompting for ideas when needed, directing picture taking when needed..."

..."Seeing vaguely verbal concepts develop into sophisticated abstractions, comparisons, generalizations, fictionalizations. That's what is happening, as it happens in an ungrammatical as far as traditional techniques are concerned." ..." The kids read to each other, ask each other for words and spellings. It is exciting to see."

From these stories, Miss Ingram and Mrs. Gardner structured language drills, to correct syntax and increase vocabulary beyond the language used in the stories. For example, the children literally translated such phrases as..."tengo 10 años" to "I have ten years". The teachers taught them the proper syntax: "I am ten years old".

This example is of the concrete, more tangible structured learning that evolves with the second-language learner's stories. Just as important as the structured drills (for the child whose native language is English as well as for the second-language-learner- is the involvement with learning. The children's pictures, of things they have conceptualized that are important to them, motivate

them to want to verbalize in language as clear as the pictures.

As a result of the Yettem School Project, the children's mastery of English, the range of topics available to them, and the sophistication of their verbal observations was better than the control group. Classroom teachers of the children in the experimental group said that overall participation and achievement has increased.

Results of the pre-and post Silvaroli Informal Reading Inventory showed that the control group children advanced at the same rate as their class. The children in the experimental group increased between-three-forths and one and one-forths years in word recognition and comprehension skills.

On the Brengelman-Manning Language Capacity Index, the experimental group's increase in scores were greater than the control group. Significance could not be reached because of the small sample. Yet there is a definite trend in the experimental group's favor. It should also be considered that teacher observation of achievement is as important as quantitative measurement.

The success of the Yettem School Project suggests a variety of possible implementations with younger children and adults, in teaching ESL with cameras as a means of motivation and relevance.

Obviously, these comments and results are not indicators of teacher-knowledge but are indeed indicators of teacher-skills-in-management and in teacher-sensitivity in the honoring of a child and who he is. Visual Literacy was proposed as link between the child and his "right to read", and we found that the child and his experiences provide the most relevant base from which to generate a language curriculum.